
**Testimony of Urban Resource Institute for the Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2026
Executive Budget Proposal: Human Services****February 5, 2026**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Samantha Cardenas, and I serve as the Senior Director of Government Affairs at the Urban Resource Institute (URI). URI is the nation's largest provider of domestic violence shelter services and a leading provider of transitional housing for families experiencing homelessness in New York City. On any given night, nearly 4,000 individuals, 60% of whom are children, find safety in one of URI's 25 shelters. Across our programs, URI creates pathways to safety, stability, and healing for survivors of domestic violence and families in crisis. In addition to residential services, URI provides trauma-informed, client-centered economic empowerment programs, youth violence prevention programs, and services that engage individuals who have caused harm in order to break cycles of violence. Research consistently shows that exposure to violence in childhood is one of the strongest predictors of future involvement in violent relationships, making early, community-based intervention essential.

New York State has experienced a significant rise in indicators of domestic violence. In 2023, orders of protection entered the New York State Domestic Violence Registry increased by 10%, and participation in the Address Confidentiality Program rose by 17%. Most notably, extreme risk protection orders increased by 123%, jumping from 4,149 in 2022 to 9,266 in 2023. These trends show a clear and escalating need for victim services and underscore the importance of investing in prevention and safety supports. Violence is preventable and New York State must invest in proven violence prevention programs. URI's Abusive Partner Intervention Program (APIP) is an evidence-based accountability model that addresses the root causes of abusive behavior. APIP combines structured group intervention, mental health support, and survivor-centered perspectives to promote lasting behavior change. An independent evaluation by the Urban Institute found that participants in trauma-informed abusive partner programs like APIP are significantly less likely to be re-arrested within 12 months than comparable individuals who do not participate. Participants also reported increased accountability, reduced acceptance of violence, and stronger understanding of the harms of intimate partner violence. URI currently operates APIP in New York City and Westchester County. With an additional investment of \$3 million, URI can expand this proven strategy to reach more families and communities across the city.

At the same time, federal threats to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) program and HUD Continuum of Care (HUD CoC) funding pose serious risks to New Yorkers who rely on housing and social safety net programs. Cuts or instability in these funding streams would directly undermine human service providers' ability to offer essential, lifesaving services to millions of New Yorkers and their families. It is essential that New York State create a \$10 million emergency reserve fund designed to stabilize the human services sector should the threats to our funding be realized.

Human services staff are essential front-line responders. They meet families at moments of profound crisis and represent New York State's commitment to dignity and safety. Yet nearly two-thirds of full-time human services workers in New York City earn wages below the City's near-poverty threshold. Without a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), many workers may qualify for the same public benefits they help clients access. URI urges New York State to fund a 2.7% COLA for human services contracts, including the domestic violence shelter workforce. This targeted inflationary adjustment is critical to stabilizing the workforce and sustaining high-quality services for New Yorkers.

A critical component to support survivors fleeing danger is accessible civil legal services and representation. Survivors regularly need legal support in securing orders of protection, custody arrangements, and U visas, all of which play a crucial role in securing immediate safety and long-term stability. The Interest on Lawyer Account (IOLA) fund is a vital source of support for civil legal services in New York State. With the \$25 million reduction in spending authority, the second year these contracts face significant cuts, which will result in a reduction in services for vulnerable communities and job losses. URI urges the State to preserve the fund's full spending authority which will ensure IOLA resources remain available to survivors seeking protection and stability as they flee domestic violence.

URI is committed to supporting survivors, strengthening families, and preventing violence. We urge the New York State to make strategic investments including \$10 million necessary to stabilize victim services providers, 2.7% inflationary adjustment to stabilize the human services workforce and \$3 million to scale evidence-based prevention programs. Together, URI and New York State can build safer, healthier communities for all New Yorkers.

For any questions, please contact our Senior Director of Government Affairs, Samantha Cardenas at scardenas@urinyc.org.